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BOOK REVIEW

Just Queer Folks: Gender and Sexuality in Rural America.
By Colin R. Johnson. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press,
2013, 247 pp., \$84.50 (cloth); \$32.95 (paper).

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Colin Johnson's book *Just Queer Folks* provides a powerful corrective to the faulty assumption that gender and sexual nonnormativity and rurality are incompatible. As a historian, Johnson focuses on both the discourses about sexuality emerging and the wide array of sexual practices occurring in the first half of the twentieth century in rural America. He analyzes a wide range of sources to make two central points: first, that heterosexuality and heteronormativity are not "indigenous to rural areas," but were constructed there (p. 18); second, that same-sex sexual behavior and gender nonconformity were commonplace in rural America in early twentieth century.

Johnson addresses emerging discourses of heterosexuality in the first section of the book. He analyzes the eugenics movement as producing a particular discourse about sexuality, one that emphasizes reproduction and rationality. Importantly, he illustrates the connection between the eugenics movement and the rural domains of agriculture, horticulture, and animal husbandry. For example, many early proponents of eugenics were themselves plant or animal breeders. Johnson argues that their expertise and concern with breeding plants and animals in order to produce the best outcome laid the foundation for a eugenic concern about how to produce the best human race. Johnson also illustrates how certain ideas about sexuality emerged from efforts to reform rural America. These reforms were spurred by the 1909 report from the Country Life Commission, whose task was to assess the overall quality of rural life and agriculture. In their report, they outlined various "country vices" (p. 54), including prostitution and masturbation, and it was such vices that reformers sought to remedy through sex education and hygiene campaigns. Johnson's analysis demonstrates how these campaigns put forth particular visions of appropriate heterosexual sex that rested on middle-class morals.

In the second section, Johnson focuses on same-sex desires and relationships and gender nonconformity in rural America. Here, Johnson's interest in "queer historicism" (p. 17) is fulfilled. Such an approach is concerned with showing the wide variation in sexual and gender difference that is obscured by identity categories such as "gay" or "straight." Johnson looks to migrant workers, men in rural communities, and the Civilian Conservation Corps, to document the many forms of queer difference that existed outside metropolitan spaces in the early twentieth century.

First, Johnson focuses on the world of men who traveled across farms, ranches, or lumber and mining camps in search of temporary work. He argues these men formed intimate friendships and that sex was commonplace. He also shows that these sexual relationships were integral to transient life and were often hierarchical insofar as an older man assumed the penetrative role and an adolescent boy assumed the penetrated role.

Turning to men who lived in small towns, Johnson documents the existence of queer men in rural communities. His discussion draws on incidents depicted in autobiographies, novels, and anthropological work. Such depictions are at times "fragmentary" as Johnson admits (p. 130), but nonetheless provide insights into how tolerance in small towns was predicated on being a "named" and "known" part of the community (p. 110). One such account described a Sunday school teacher from a prominent family who cross-dressed. Johnson argues that the community's reaction to the gender nonconformity, which was to fire him, stands in stark contrast to the punishments of being jailed or institutionalized faced by men who cross-dressed in urban areas at the time. Johnson's final example that illustrates the degree to which gender nonconformity occurred outside metropolitan areas comes from the camps established in remote locations by the Civilian Conservation Corps. He documents the homosocial worlds of these camps, showing how cross-dressing, public showers, and admiration of men's bodies were common aspects of camp life.

The book also includes a discussion of poor and working-class heterosexual white rural women. He discusses how these "hard" women were read as overly masculine and excessively sexually reproductive. However, the latter claim warrants further investigation. He documents rural women's negotiation with emerging fashion and consumer culture emerging in the early twentieth century that was at odds with realities of farm life. The judgment and shame these women felt because they were unable to embody the newly circulating ideals of femininity is precisely why Johnson claims them as queer subjects. Yet lacking is a focus on same-sex sexual practices or homosocial worlds that women might have sustained in rural America in the early twentieth century.

Taken as a whole, the book succeeds in mapping the wide range of queer practices that were commonplace for men in rural America. Further, the range of sources Johnson draws on is impressive and thus the book serves as an exemplar for scholars seeking to do queer historicism.